

# *apuntes*

Reflexiones teológicas desde el contexto Hispano-Latino

**Syncretic, Indigenous, and Otherwise Embodied:  
On the Healing Return of  
the Repressed into a Dissociate World**

*Álvaro Eduardo De Prat*

**Theological and Ministerial *Apuntes*  
About Immigration in a Different "Space"**

*Julian Andres González*

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# *Apuntes*

## *Theological Reflections from a Hispanic-Latino Context*

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## From the Editor

*Apuntes* is committed and dedicated to explore themes relevant to the Hispanic community and on this issue; I have the privilege to introduce two excellent articles which exemplify this type of commitment and dedication. First is an article from Álvaro De Prat, who was born in Venezuela and where he managed departments of publications, public relations and international marketing. After attempting various entrepreneur opportunities in solar and alternative energy industries in native Venezuela, he relocated to the U.S. where De Prat recently graduated from City College in New York with a Bachelor of Arts in Ethics and Politics of a Plural World. He received the CWE Leonard Spano Award for Excellence in History and Social Sciences. De Prat speaks five languages and became a certified court interpreter in late 2010. He works for six county courts in New Jersey and as a conference and legal interpreter across various states. The second article also features a South American, Julian González, who was born in Colombia and currently is a third year PhD student in Old Testament at Southern Methodist University, and the recipient of the first doctoral fellowship from The Center for the Study of Latino/a Christianity and Religions. His research and academic interests are focused on the cultural analysis in the hermeneutical task to understand how different cultures enrich reading and theological speculation, particularly how cultural analysis helps to determine how the readings may be irrelevant or become instruments of social and political manipulation. Julian is interested in making connections between the academic rigor of theological speculation and the actual use of such ideas as any academic task ignores the reality of the communities in turn will be ignored by the communities.

I am certain, that these two articles will provide excellent insights and will stimulate critical discussion related to our Latino/a identity as well as, once again, helping us to see another angle in the immigration debate. In addition to these articles, I also want to encourage our readers to consider a great opportunity in which themes related to our contextual reality will be addressed as well, which is a conference in honor of Dr. Justo González, properly named "Dr. Justo L. González: His legacy to the Hispanic/Latino-a Church and beyond. This conference will be held in Orlando, FL on Oct. 19-20, 2012. Dr. González was the first editor of *Apuntes*, and his ministry and writings have been extremely influential in creating a space for all us in both academic and ecclesiastic circles, and this conference will honor and highlight Dr. González's contributions. For more information and details please visit <http://www.thejustocenter.org/>

As always, it is my hope that in reading these articles, each reader will be inspired by these excellent contributions to implement plans of action and ministerial programs to address social issues and concerns present in our communities.

# Syncretic, Indigenous, and Otherwise Embodied: On the Healing Return of the Repressed into a Dissociate World

Álvaro Eduardo De Prat

*What we call the "I" or self is the shadow of a delay mechanism in the brain between its "oceanic" state of world perception and its "substitution," namely the selective reading of the same event through linguistic structures.*

Antonio T. de Nicolas

*Pilgrims, Puritans, Quakers, Anglicans—none of them thought the use of musical instruments in church proper (though there was always a liberal tide in the Anglican church that wanted to have an organ).*

Ned Soubllette

## I. Our Dysfunctional "Global" World

It is a well-established fact that only after the Cuban revolution a whole new field of scholarly interest started to be funded in the United States.<sup>1</sup> That field was variously called "Pan-American," "Hemispherical," or "Latin American Studies." Amid the realities of the Cold War, it aimed mostly to justify (and thus to preserve) the enormous disparities—and not the doomed relationship—between the developments of the two Americas on the different "stocks" that had composed their origins. St. Augustine's City of God and its alternative interpretations by Catholics and Protestants served some of the most original researchers to explain, from the sixties on, why while the Liberal North had succeeded in the path of progress, their brothers in the South were doomed, due to a veritably inherited Spanish flu.

On top of the biases of these Liberal exegeses—and the shortcomings of other Western critiques, either Marxist or the at times merely racially and pseudo-autochthonously Nationalistic—few of these inquiries stopped to consider that, south of the Rio Grande, different worldviews as coherent, long-lasting, and entrenched as that of the Muslims and the other "heathens of the East" had survived and intermingled with the Iberian Catholic hordes.

But there is value in these "hemispherical" studies, since a handful indirectly point us to why other worldviews could resist, or else syncretized and survived in the South. As Glen

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<sup>1</sup> Important research took place, too, after the Mexican Revolution, but far from having a comparable scope.



Glen Caudil Dealy states in his *The Tradition of Monistic Democracy in America*: "The common good is the goal of St. Augustine's City of Man. It is the reference point of Catholic politics. While recognizing that man's ultimate goal is the hereafter of the Heavenly City, the common good is a 'realistic' goal for fallen man while participating in the life of the Earthly City [...]. Thus, whereas liberal pluralistic democracy centers around the other-worldly goal of individual salvation (self-interest), monistic democracy stresses the importance of [...] the communal good."<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, in this so-called "global," upside-down world, I find in Dealy's explanation of the City of God's Catholic understanding a reverse interpretation of Latin American failures as bittersweet motives to celebrate, regardless of the myriad horrors that the Iberians brought upon the continent and their more naïve, rather primitive repressions of indigenous worldviews.

Long before the necessary labyrinthine justifications for an Iberian *missionary enterprise* in the Americas, and of its streamlined *reformation by their brethren in the North into a survivalist's commercial exploitation by the Elect of the reject* (and later, of the global rest), the concept of modernity that today legitimizes a "global world" was coined in St. Augustine's times to distinguish *that present*, then officially Christian, from its pagan past.<sup>3</sup> After some necessary detours, next we explore *today's meaning* of these "pagan worldviews" having resisted and mutated in America; or quoting the late—egregiously forgotten—Argentinean philosopher Rodolfo Kusch, of "something that breathes within the continent itself." In his words:

<sup>2</sup> Glen Caudil Dealy, *The Tradition of Monistic Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 35, No. 4, Oct. – Dec., 1974, 626-646), 631.

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib, ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 39. I cannot enough recommend Antony Anghie's *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* to understand how our "international system" has legitimized this immoral order. How the Catholic Church's originally *ecclesiastic justifications to "convert"* the inhabitants of the New World morphed in Northern Europe into a secular, *natural law* to legitimize plunder, enslavement, and extermination; and eventually into a "scientific" law that would herald our world's virtual apartheid. Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, this *positivist law* mutated yet again into the more insidious *pragmatic international law* that emerged with the Mandate system. A form that, since the Bretton Woods system, has distilled into the blinding purity of *economics* in institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Either América is the hole where a humanity limited to *homo faber* is to be buried, or *homo faber* covers only one aspect of the totality of man. In the later case, it is possible that the blockage is due to the fact that in América residual aspects of man accumulate, those aspects that were not predicted by Western thinking [...] Could the blockage be due to a dialectical moment pointing to the rescue of the missing part of the mutilated conception of modern man? Not to accept this would be to suppress the [...] Américan *pueblo* so that a small executive bourgeoisie fulfills its programs of development, and this is impossible.<sup>4</sup>

As Tomoko Masuzawa says in *The Invention of World Religions. Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*:

If we survey comparatively Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (1756), Lessing's *Education of the Human Race* (1780), Hegel's oddly majestic *Philosophy of History* (1830—31), as well as works by Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, E. B. Taylor, James Frazer, and numerous other accounts of the nineteenth century, it is evident that their developmental schemata forecast the impending moment of apotheosis in varying ways. One version of the account projects Protestant Christianity transcending its own historically particular origins, its own cultural limitations and finitude; consequently, triumphant modern Christianity will become something else altogether than "mere" religion. Or, alternatively, a new, transcultural, objective world consciousness of science will override and vanquish the magical, religious, and metaphysical worldviews hitherto dogmatically upheld by hidebound traditions; consequently, religion—and certainly any particular religion—will be obsolete and irrelevant. In either scenario, the universal principle that guarantees the [...] world as totality ultimately comes to prevail as a direct extension of European Christianity, or Europe as (erstwhile) Christendom.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the *idea of the human person* that developed out of Protestant, individualistic morality, was for Emile Durkheim the reigning successor of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> It is ironic that this *advance* at the dawn of the Enlightenment, an *Erasmian* humanism originally supported by

<sup>4</sup> Rodolfo Kusch, *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 155.

<sup>5</sup> Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions. Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 12-3.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Featherstone, "Global Culture: An Introduction," in *Global Culture, Globalization, and Modernity*, Mike Featherstone, ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 4.



Martin Luther through his *Ninety-five Theses* (to reject that freedom from God's punishment of sin could be sold by the Vatican *for money*), in Luther's hands would become a differently explicit understanding of *The City of God* wherewith the emerging North European powers would eventually legitimate the plunder and pillage of our world. As Luther himself expressed: "Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where justice resides."<sup>7</sup> This dictum changed our world. From Luther to Thomas Hobbes' *State of Nature* as a "war of all against all" and to Adam Smith's "invisible hand" it was all a matter of fine-tuning. As Mark Edwards's *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* explains: "Luther is not simply one publicist within a larger constellation. Rather, he was the dominant publicist. And he dominated to a degree that no other person to my knowledge has ever dominated a major propaganda campaign and mass movement since. Not Lenin, not Mao Tse-tung, not Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, or Patrick Henry."<sup>8</sup> The Reformist revision of the *City of God* not only caused a schism within Christianity: it was the straw that split our souls after centuries of a hopeless universalizing project, *at last succeeding to impose a Christianity that Christ would have abhorred*.<sup>9</sup>

As Nelly Richard explains in her *La Estratificación de los Márgenes*:

Es sabido que la modernidad internacional traza su eje (histórico, filosófico, político, económico y cultural) siguiendo una vocación triplemente unificadora-uniformadora [...]— primero [...] como proyecto de racionalización. Es decir, como

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *Let Your Sins Be Strong: A Letter From Luther to Melancthon*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, Letter no. 99, 1 August 1521, N.D.), Vol. 15, cols. 2585-2590.

<sup>8</sup> Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), xii.

<sup>9</sup> To grasp the original seed behind our self-styled "globalization," Theodor Mommsen's *St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of the City of God*, may help us understand how Protestant Christianity did nothing but take to its logical conclusion the unique project that emerged when Hellenist rationalism merged with Judeo-Christian legalism in jurisprudential Rome: "According to Prudentius: God had assigned to the Romans the task of conquering the world and establishing a universal empire so as to pave the way for the spread of the universal religion." Specifically on "progress," Eusebius—together with Prudentius strongly criticized by St. Augustine—adds: "The Roman nations in one harmonious whole has already been secured to a large degree, it is destined to be still more perfectly attained, even to the conquest of the ends of the inhabitable world." Theodor E. Mommsen, "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of the City of God" *Journal of the History of ideas*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Jun., 1951).

“avance de la racionalidad cognoscitiva-instrumental” [...]—segundo [...] tecnificando las condiciones de eficiencia de su racionalidad funcionalista [...] bajo la normativa de un sistema sometido a la transparencia de un cálculo de “performatividad”.—y tercero, el avance “civilizador” de la modernidad ligado a un modelo desarrollista de progreso industrial, asocia esta modernidad a la expansión del capitalismo internacional y a sus lógicas de mercado atravesadas por la red metropolitana del poder económico[...]Esta triple fundamentación de la pretensión normadora de la modernidad bastaría para demostrar la vinculación de su proyecto con los enfoques universalizantes de una cultura que busca producir y reproducir el consenso en torno a sus modelos dominantes de verdad y progreso.<sup>10</sup>

And as it follows from Richards’ thorough dissection, it is inevitable to find striking correspondences between Modernity’s deeply *dichotomous, uniforming, functionalist, and split rationalizations*, as they manifest in the so-called “globalization,” and Sigmund Freud’s cartography of the mind as to both the symptoms and self-destructiveness of a disassociated personality. Indeed, it seems at times surprising how most of the notable *progressive* thinkers of modernity, from Walter Benjamin to Theodor Adorno, through Foucault to Derrida or Habermas, have all given their whole to redress “the unfinished project of modernity”—in the words of Habermas—without having emphasized the many symptomatic Freudian correspondences of this *grandiosely, hyper-rational, superego in the West* that with ever increasing recklessness has disassociated from its *subconscious rest*: from *humanity*!<sup>11</sup>

But theirs is the very sin in which Freud incurred after discovering our “balancing *other*.” In *Civilization and its Discontents*, as an undercurrent permeating his latest masterpiece on the malaise of our culture, Freud starts with an *oddly emotional charge against religious feeling*: “Freud located the *oceanic* feeling within the primitive ego—more precisely, within primary narcissism and the ego ideal—which is later reduced to a ‘shrunk residue’ under

<sup>10</sup> Nelly Richard, *La Estratificación de los Márgenes* (Santiago de Chile: Atenea impresores, Ltda, 1989), 39.

<sup>11</sup> We must not forget here Freud’s introduction of the *ego-ideal* or *super-ego*. In his *On Narcissism*, in 1914, he argued that this *portion of the ego* was equally unconscious (Freud, 1923: 444-455). He would thus—incorrectly—deduct that “...symptoms are the product of unconscious ideas pressing toward expression and unconscious defenses keeping them at bay...[they] can be modified two ways: the lessening of the intensity of unconscious urges pressing towards consciousness or the strengthening of the defenses against those urges.” (Smith et al, 1993: 26). Using our metaphor, for centuries that has been the “state of war” prescription among the West and with the rest. Following some of Freud’s successors, a third possibility is proposed in this work: that the *unconscious*, instead of repressed should be *integrated*.



the influence of reality. Freud compared that ego to the vestiges of ancient Rome lying beneath the constructions of later centuries."<sup>12</sup> He, who fathomed our every mask, could never see *the religious* beneath religions' politics. But what befuddles me is that it is in his most illuminating map that we encounter Freud's blind spot; a black hole of gigantic proportions considering that *Eros* was his life-long companion and confidant. Speaking of his greatest discovery—the subconscious—to spurn the *oceanic* as a *primitive religious feeling*, Freud stated that: "This ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else. That such an appearance is deceptive, and that on the contrary the ego is continued inwards [...] was a discovery first made by psycho-analytic research [...] But towards the outside, at any rate, the ego seems to maintain clear and sharp lines of demarcation (with the exception that) at the height of being in love the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away."<sup>13</sup>

Yet any primitive indigenous worldview (or all pantheistic religions) would find Freud's assessment to be precisely wrong. In stark contrast with the subsequent contributions made by the "troublesomely conservative" Carl Gustav Jung (and for that matter, by the sadly unacknowledged Wilhelm Reich), Freud "discovered" the subconscious only to grow increasingly uncomfortable with it.<sup>14</sup> A true son of the Enlightenment programme,

<sup>12</sup> Henri Vermorel and Madeleine Vermorel, eds. *Sigmund Freud et Rolland Romain. Correspondance 1923-1936* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 12-3.

<sup>14</sup> In German, the "Id" means simply the "it," born already a sub-human category in Freud's topography. Wilhelm Reich was an irrational quack to some, as Nietzsche, to others, had been mad from start. Both were equally hated, differently loved and abused. Reich was a Van Gogh of the body-mind: our body's heart. Every day contributing more discoveries, as Nietzsche himself had to be "rediscovered," both with similar embarrassment and equal distance. Yet Reich has been the Western pioneer of body-existence. His theses multiple, his insights mind-boggling; his sin not that he was an anti-fascist, ex-communist, fallen psychoanalyst, expatriate of various countries, but that, much more than Freud, he related *all* of our maladies to our Western culture's only being possible on the condition of a *stifling of our vital energies*. Worse yet, that instead of psychoanalyzing us to help us better accept modern life, *and live with it*, Reich's work and therapies centered almost exclusively in releasing the repressed life from our "armored" bodies, those things desecrated; and then necessarily to proposing drastic reforms of the body politic, that thing most sacred of all. His techniques would be abundantly copied decades later by the schools of Gestalt, Fritz Perls (psychoanalyzed by Reich), Carl Rogers, the Encounter Movement and others, not to mention the post-Reichians and his disciples proper. In like manner, his revolutionary theory of "unblocking the orgasmic

would end up seeing only in the abrupt manifestations of the repressed, *and not in the concrete repressions that caused them*, the question that needed to be addressed. In his last great work, *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays*, he reveals: "It is worth specially stressing the fact that each portion which returns from oblivion asserts itself with peculiar force, exercises an incomparably powerful influence on people in the mass, and raises an irresistible claim to truth against which logical objections remain powerless [...]. This remarkable feature can only be understood on the pattern of the delusion of the psychotics."<sup>15</sup> In the words of Frantz Fanon, according to Edward Said "surely Freud's most disputatious heir," we find a more bottom-up global and thus integral understanding of this reality: Said points at how Fanon "First of all [...] notes that to the European, the non-European world contain only natives, and [...] after listing how the native is diagnosed by the European clinical psychiatrist as a savage killer who kills for no reason [...] when you extend not just Freud, but all the scientific achievements of European science, into the practice of colonialism, Europe ceases to occupy a normative position with regards to the native: 'Leave this Europe where they are never done talking on Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them [...] in all the corners of the globe [...] Europe undertook the leadership of the world with ardor, cynicism, and violence [...] When I search Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.'"<sup>16</sup> Only in the words of José Martí or Aimé Césaire we can find as lucid indictments.<sup>17</sup>

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potency" would be literally reproduced by Erik Erikson, Otto Fenichel, and other important figures after the forties. Yet not many were true to his postulates as to the importance of gentleness when dealing with these processes, and *the need to focus on reconnecting the patient with his or her life force*.

<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism; Three Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, Standard Edition, Vol. 23, 1939), 85.

<sup>16</sup> Edward W. Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London: Verso, 2003), 18-23.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, thus speaks an *integrated* reason: "The essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly—that is, dangerously—and to answer clearly the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies." Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on*



Contrary to Freud's assessment, for many years now I have had the clear perception that it is our "pagan," *oceanic* feelings, that predate religious politics not as a "shrunk residue," but as a *socially enforced lobotomy*. Using the chemical model, I see the former as the neurological match within us that has paved the way for the Opium of the People and their killing machines; those *ideologizing* processes that, after being honed and perfected across millennia, were only to reach their metallic zenith in the now all-pervading, *alienating trinity* of Rationalism, Technology, and Consumerism.

In fact, according to doctors Eugene D'Aquilli and Andrew Newberg:

*All unitary experiences*—ranging from mild aesthetic, such as watching a beautiful sunset, to the most profound states that may occur only after years of meditation—may have their basis in neuroanatomy, neurophysiology, and the flux of neurotransmitters. We have even suggested that there is an *aesthetic-religious continuum*...Our recent brain imaging studies of Tibetan Buddhist meditators have begun to provide empirical evidence for the specific mechanisms involved.<sup>18</sup>

And from the same research, Martha Beck, Ph.D., former assistant at Harvard Business School gone to the Dark Side of Self-Help texts, explains:

The moment the meditators achieved a sensation of unbounded bliss, the superior posterior parietal lobe lit up like a storefront in December. This area of the brain allows us to feel the difference between our environment and ourselves. Without it, you would have no sense of a "me" that exists inside of your skin and an "outside world" that isn't you. This brain region is situated next to an area that has to do with sexual responses. The feeling of mystical experience is not only experientially but also neurologically very close to the feeling of falling in love.<sup>19</sup>

*Colonialism. A Poetics of Anticolonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 33. As for Martí, one needs only to reread *Nuestra América* to find in that brief indictment our civilization's diagnosis, prognosis, and cure.

<sup>18</sup> Eugene D'Aquilli and Andrew B Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experiences*. (Chicago: Fortress Press, 1999), for this text quoted from an interview in *Other Voices*, "The Question of God," [www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/voices/newberg.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/voices/newberg.html), date unknown.

<sup>19</sup> Martha Beck, "How We Hear Here," in *Steering by Starlight* (New York: Rodale Inc. 2008), 150.

To be sure, progress is still being resisted. Next we explore in the works of ethnographers Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*; Yvonne Daniel's *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé*; Margarite Fernández Olmos & Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*; of historian and musician Ned Soublette's *The World that Made New Orleans, from Spanish Silver to Congo Square* and through some important excerpts of the late Argentinean philosopher Rodolfo Kusch, how for hundreds of years a set of rich and coherent *pagan understandings* have survived and thrive in our continent. Indeed, *what is there in those "indigenous worldviews"* that may help our planet regain its soul.

## II. The Return of the Repressed

Central to our heathens' worldviews is the theme of embodiment: of body, heart, and the Spirit; of community and of Earth. First we shall address this embodied ethics through a compilation of quotes from our mentioned authors. A series of snapshots only, to witness the Spirit dancing in cyclical time, while it lives. My dissecting narrative, particularly anticlimactic and rather insulting in reference to this theme—but also indispensable in an academic environment, will merely enter as counterpoints after some sets. To redeem—or to bury—myself before my scholarly peers, I will conclude this text proposing a “new,” dangerous scientific bio-cultural paradigm: a soon to be “politically incorrect” neurological explanation that may lay at the base of our different worldviews while it turns Freud and our current, still concealed racial Darwinism (in the trope of Freud, “the necessary stages of development through which every race has passed”) on their heads.<sup>20</sup>

And yet as Rachel Hastings warns us in *Performative Decolonization: Critical Performance Ethnography, Rize, and the Battle to Articulate Race*, even before Darwin, the Enlightenment was instrumental in institutionalizing the European perceptions of the human race, since “leading theorists of race [...] like Kant and Blumenbach, were dependent on the information available to them, which was mainly supplied by travelers in missionary activity, colonial enterprises, and trade, including of course the slave trade.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> As quoted in Bronislaw Malinowsky and Havelock Ellis, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North Western Melanesia* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2005, [1929]), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Rachel Hastings, *Performative Decolonization: Critical Performance, Ethnography, Rize, and the Battle to Articulate Race* (Radical Philosophy Review, Volume 12, numbers 1-2 (2009), 44.



But let us start by citing Kusch, who understood better than most:

The problem of understanding, according to our Western point of view, seems to have four stages. First, a *reality* that is given *outside of us*. Second, an *understanding* of that reality. Third, a *knowledge* or *science* that is the outcome of the administration of understandings, and fourth, an *action* that returns to reality in order to modify it [...] But what does the Indian understand by *reality*, by *understanding*, by *knowledge*, and by *action*? The Indian does not 'look so much to the effect as to the way of doing.' For example the form of the verb "to carry" in the Aymara tongue depends on "whether the thing carried is a person or a beast or whether the thing is long, heavy, or light." Now, what does it mean that in one language movement, events, the process of becoming are registered before things? [...] The "way of doing" something and not the doing in itself taken as an abstract concept [...] indicates the predominance of *emotional feeling* over the act of seeing itself, in such a way that one *sees to feel* [...] Emotion is what drives one in the face of reality. The indigenous person takes reality not as something stable and inhabited by objects. Rather, he takes it as a screen without things but with intense movement in which he tends to notice the auspicious or ominous sign of every movement before anything else. The indigenous person registers reality as the *affect* it exercises on him before registering it as a perceptual connotation [...] The Indian is not, then, the "photographic subject" [...] rather, **he participates in understanding, and in greater measure than we do. His knowledge is not of a reality constituted by objects, but one full of movements and happenings.**<sup>22</sup>

In her *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé*, Yvonne Daniel makes a similar point, but this time referring to Afro-American syncretism in Latin America:

Ritual dance performance was a repository of remembered movements and musical components but also a repository of complementary legends, beliefs, and attitudes, with contrasting and alternative resolutions for temporal problems. These repositories held responses and possibilities for many social situations. The dance and music "housed" not only physical information about the human body in dance mode but also theoretical, emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual information.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Kusch, *Ibid.* 10-12.

<sup>23</sup> Yvonne Daniels, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 54.

As to our cultural split, Daniels strikingly concludes with Kusch that:

From the period of enslavement through to the present, disembodied knowledge has dominated the Americas as a valued social paradigm [...] The lay public, including ritual community members, students, and others, has been encouraged to think of scientific theoretical knowledge as superior to, rather than equal to, practical, experiential, or kinesthetic knowledge (Gardener and Hatch, 1998).<sup>24</sup>

Or Karen McCarthy points out in *Mama Lola*: “The disembodied character of much of white Euro-American culture is striking. As adults, we do so little dancing, and it scarcely occurs to us that this has anything to do with the character of public moral discourse.”<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere she adds: “The suspicion of sexuality that has long characterized European and American Christian culture can easily flow over into a repression of general life.”<sup>26</sup> For the kill, and in our ring of the return to both Freud and to psychoanalysis in general, Fernández and Paravisini’s *Creole Religions* cite Koss and Chioino:

Both psychological and traditional healers intend to work with elements of self beyond those that are conscious and visible, beyond verbal expressions and behavior: psychiatrists use “psyche” or “personality,” psychologists use the “unconscious”. . . and Spiritists work with “spirits.” All of these are culturally constituted constructs about human beings that structure individual awareness.<sup>27</sup>

But to understand the radically different purposes with which each worldview “embodies” these “culturally constituted constructs,” at this point I strongly encourage you to *reread* my footnote on Reich, on page 42 (i.e. footnote #14). In fact, the clear association of the body with sexuality and the need to stifle our “base instincts” (the force of life *vitally alive among the heathen*) is at the root of all: the Enlightenment, Protestantism, racial Darwinism, and the justifications for Colonialism—of Capitalism to our self-styled global world.

On this subject, we could amply elaborate from the work of Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, and of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (the latter also influenced by Reich), yet

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>25</sup> Karen McCarthy Brown’s *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010 [1991, 2001]), xxxviii.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Margarite Fernández Olmos & Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert’s *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: an Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 235.



This is out of the scope of this paper. More attuned to our topic are the next two excerpts from Ned Soublette's *The World that Made New Orleans, from Spanish Silver to Congo Square*:

While many of the elements of capitalism were present early on in the history of commerce, the word *capital* comes into use precisely in the era of the Antillean plantations, with the publication of Turgot's *Reflections on the Formation and distribution of Wealth* [...] Other key works of philosophy, science, and economics appeared in that period, articulating [...] courses of thought that still remain in the air. In 1775, Johan Friedrich Blumenbach's thesis *De generis humani varietate nativa* (*On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*) was a milestone of scientific racism that divided the human species into five "races" [...] and determined that "Caucasians" had higher mental abilities and "Ethiopians" were closer to apes. The following year [...] Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* famously proposed that markets function by means of a mystical "invisible hand," an idea still worshipped at the altar of marketplace ideology in our own time. In 1798, Thomas Robert Malthus' *An Essay on the Principle of Population* argued that population increases geometrically whereas food supply increases arithmetically, positing the division of society into a fortunate few versus a wretched mass, and celebrating the virtue of hard work [...] None of these thinkers ever set foot on an Antillean plantation. Surely, they consumed both coffee and sugar, all of which was grown by slaves.<sup>28</sup>

With the coming of Protestantism, the explicit or tacit "dead weight of a common good" at the core of most religious practices and worldviews was at last transcended. To attribute to this fairly advantageous Protestant ethics of entitlement the exceptionalism to sack our world is a unique sort of spell. In the words of Max Weber: "The concept of the calling quickly gave to the modern entrepreneur a fabulously clear conscience—and also industrious workers; he gave to his employees as the wages of their ascetic devotion to the calling and of co-operation in his ruthless exploitation of them through capitalism the prospect of eternal salvation."<sup>29</sup> Weber rightly argued that Catholicism "impeded the development of the capitalist economy in the West," as did its likes Confucianism and Buddhism elsewhere in the world.<sup>30</sup>

As to the connection between Protestantism, the Enlightenment, and a radical extermination of competing worldviews starting in Anglo-America (the reason for which we cannot study "Syncretism in the United States"), and now inexorably spreading into the rest

<sup>28</sup> Ned Soublette, *The World that Made New Orleans, from Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009), 134-35.

<sup>29</sup> Max Weber, *Global Economic History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1981), 367.

<sup>30</sup> Weber, *Ibid.*, 368.

of our world via “globalization,” Soubllette’s *The World that Made New Orleans* is once again *enlightening*:

The new evangelical movement—as of 1529 it would be called Protestantism—emphasized inner piety instead of outward ceremony. It flourished via a new medium that fostered private thought: the mechanically printed book. Publication of the Bible in the various languages of Europe occasioned the spread of literacy and scholarship and provided a vast market for the new printing industry, as heresy and the press fed each other [...] The dour French Protestant Jean Calvin fled Paris in 1533, ultimately arriving in Geneva. In the Germanic territories and Scandinavia Lutheranism generally took hold; elsewhere, the Calvinist held sway.<sup>31</sup>

I have been to ceremonies or performances in Cuba representing five different (broadly defined) African groups—Congo, Carabalí, Arará, Gangá, and Yoruba—each with their own distinct drums, performed by practitioners of the respective religious tradition, and sung in African languages. This doesn’t exist in the United States, where British colonial slave owners and their Anglo-American successors did their best to exterminate the drums, religions, and languages so that Africans could not communicate in secret [...] The one place where drumming and other direct manifestations of Africanness continued to be openly displayed in public, on a limited basis—[...] the legacy of the Spanish period—was new Orleans.<sup>32</sup>

Still, it is a humbling fact to remember how our world’s “conquering ‘American’ music” (Blues, Jazz, Rock, and Pop) is the closest thing that exists to *North-American syncretism*... thanks in good part to the Spaniards. But today we have become more civilized. We try not to exterminate competing worldviews anymore—whenever possible—and instead resort to expropriations of meaning, to an artful “containment by co-opting.” Instead of obliterating others, we now recur to commodifying and incorporating them even as this term, “in-corporate,” tells the story of our dis-embodiment.

That is the subject of some important warnings that we find on “syncretism” as a new form of “Rock & Roll”—that both profits from it and removes its *sting*—tragically aborted, as in the new Vodou-*Suspense* novel *Outside the Bones*, by Lyn de Lorio, and in more “academic” works like the heavily scholarly and mostly empty *Religion and the Politics of Ethnic Identity in Bahia, Brazil*, by Stephen Selka, which basically intends to justify—if by

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<sup>31</sup> Soubllette, *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Soubllette, *Ibid.*, 23.



discreet means—how the presence of Evangelical America in Brazil has brought Brazilians a true understanding of their racial inequalities.

“Divide and conquer” has always been the name of the game. Yet as Mama Lola reminds us: “In Haiti, human connection is the assumption; it is separation that requires both effort and explanation. That is why a Haitian may quiz a beggar on the street in Port-au-Prince before giving alms. What family is it that does not provide food and shelter for one of its own?”<sup>33</sup> And Mama Lola goes on to explain what lays at the core of Vodou (and, for that matter, of all Afro-American syncretist and indigenous worldviews): “Our national religion is grounded in a system of balance: balance within ourselves, in interpersonal relationships, in our rapport with the divine, in the way we understand and use power, in the task of negotiating life morally, in the harmony we seek with nature.”<sup>34</sup> And McCarthy completes: “Haiti’s prized gift might then be [...] its *ethos* of sharing as *partage*—concepts best conveyed in the simplicity of Toto Bissainthe’s song “*Ti mòso manje fèt pou I separe*” (Every inch, every morsel of food must be shared), in the traditional proverb *Manje Kuit pa gen mèt* (A cooked meal belongs to all), or even in Mama Lola’s exclamation: “*When I eat alone, I have nothing...*”<sup>35</sup>

### III. Conclusion

This work has not intended to *describe* the richness of syncretism or of indigenous worldviews; what syncretism *is*. In fact, I have not even dared to *ethnographically consider its rituals and deities*. How it operates cannot—should not—be narrated, *but rather explored in its own terms*. I have just tried to elucidate what syncretism *means in our world today*, while, at the same time, staying aware of the forces at play both in its favor and against it.

While we reach for the stars, in our world, *eighteen million people die of hunger alone every year*, not to consider the myriad more fallen due to our self-righteous, yet *economically motivated* wars, and the poverty-related casualties of an overheated planet. That is, omitting the hundreds of millions who live in unending horror. Against this appalling reality, rather than shell-shocked we seem comfortably numb. Fallen, like whole populations fall the world over, pray to the addictive imperatives of consumerism’s black hole; a plague that has split us from our humanity both without and *within*. Indeed, we “the privileged” have become disconnected. Other than for our fears, we appear unable to feel in our guts what is right from wrong anymore. Having coasted on a *prosthetic protestant ethics* for far too long, we now *sleep* through the media our repressed terrors—and a guilty consciousness—in the form of

<sup>33</sup> McCarthy Brown, *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

inconsequential killings, fashionable apocalypses, antiseptic sex, and cosmetic love. While the addictive culture is imposed by any means in the four corners of our planet—squaring the globe regardless of casualties—our very lives have dwindled at the service of one god: Money. We are perhaps too scared, and thus incapable of caring, of sharing and feeling any meaning or true love anymore due to a perceived threat of losing whatever feeds our disassociated existences: irrelevant purchases, alienating jobs, enslaving religions, codependent relationships, irrational ideologies; the crowded loneliness and poisoned fears of a “withdrawal shock.” For these we would kill and *indeed are dying*, since even when privileged we are terminally sick.

In the end, “syncretic” or not, our surviving “primitive worldviews”—*our very survival*—are about one thing: *the embodiment of ethics*. Our own possible *re-embodiment* must *incorporate everything that is as syncretism does*: the worlds of Spirit, Earth, our communities, our bodies, and minds as all equally important and constantly present. In the words of Rodolfo Kusch:

Indigenous thinking and Buddhism start from the same point and move the same springs. They start, in short, from the only true philosophical experience: the surprise of discovering the crossroads that obtain from mere *estar* bearing the sense of the absolute. [...] Whether we like it or not, man is half filled with things and half filled with gods, even in the twentieth century, and specially in América.<sup>36</sup>

I would like to conclude these reflections by introducing my forewarned *dangerous scientific bio-cultural paradigm*. A “politically incorrect,” over one-page long quote, by Stony Brooks’ Professor Emeritus of Philosophy Antonio de Nicolas: one that may turn both Freud and most of our Western scientific paradigms on their heads even at the risk of *co-opting*. Developing his theses will be the subject of a separate treatise. Even if, *by definition*, one cannot “*narrate*” the sub-conscious, but learn only to heed it.<sup>37</sup>

Biology and culture act on one another as the conditioning parameters of neuro-cultural in-formation. Through mutual interaction, biology in humans becomes culture and vice versa. Culture opens and stimulates the neural passages of the brains, accounting for the varieties of brains in humans, and for cultural diversity. Culture conditions and stimulates biology, while biology conditions and makes culture possible. Cultures and brains may be distinguished from one

<sup>36</sup> Kusch, Ibid., 171-2.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote #11 on Freud, about the *super-ego* being a “portion of the ego” but also *unconscious*.



another through identification with certain functions or combination of functions that are exercised habitually, **or become neural hard-wire through repetition, or habit.**

The single fact that is most important for any consideration of ethics is the fact that our human neural-cultural activity begins with us even earlier than birth with the development of the reptilian brain, to be followed immediately by the development and formation of the limbic brain and only later by the right neo-cortex. These developments coincide with the three brains of the right hemisphere and their primary criteria for identification: reptilian-kinesthetic, limbic-auditory, right neocortex-visual. [...] Up to this stage of our human development, namely up to the age of eleven, the brain and the faculty by which we create reason and ethics of the type we have come to know today, has not yet appeared in the human brain. Yet, by this stage of development, if the child has been properly exercised he/she is already kinesthetically, limbically-affective, and visually-imagistically linked to the whole of creation, divine, social and individual. The child, if his/her brains are developed through exercise, familial or social, is already ethically linked to him/herself, and the world; the child acts, has likes and dislikes, makes decisions. **It is only by age eleven, when these other links are already in place, that the two brains of the left neo-cortex open up: the left-brain mimetic brain, translating the right hemisphere's input into symbolic language, or into the digital, logomaquic world of names and recognition of such, introduced in the species through writing, and identified as the "interpreter module."** These five brains, five intelligence centers [...] form five invariant epistemologies on which all human acting and human knowing is based...

The ethics of reason we live under [...] superimposes a shadow of theory on an ethical reality already in existence. This theoretical ethics is not imposed on a depraved world, or on ourselves with no idea of what is right or wrong, but rather, it is imposed as a program of ethics on the world and ourselves on the false assumption that the criteria by which we previously judged, interacted, loved, hated, did right, avoided wrong, etc. **are false and we should learn new ones.** These new ones being not only of a different kind to those we were accustomed to, **but demand that we cancel those we previously had and adopt the new ones, even if this means that we become invisible, as individuals, to ourselves and others.** We are now ciphers of a theoretical world where only ciphers live. **We have ethics, but we have lost our heart and thus our individual selves...**

**It is no accident that the first code of head-ethics dispensed on humans came by the hand of those who discovered and introduced writing and the left brain, who proclaimed external gods, and who started their laws**

by the denials of the world already existing: "Do not do this!, Do not do that!" It must have been an extraordinary epiphany when those who introduced into the species the technologies of the left brain discovered its operation. We are still intoxicated by the power of its abstractions. We were so intoxicated that in its name we annihilated most of the environment and each other to the point that we are proposing to remedy the situation by becoming ethical.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Antonio T. de Nicolas, *Heart Ethics: The Indian Legacy and Human Ecology after the Year 2000*; visit, [http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/s\\_es\\_s\\_es\\_denic\\_heart\\_frameset.htm](http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/s_es_s_es_denic_heart_frameset.htm)



## Resumen

Para lograr entender una civilización que ha devenido profundamente *escindida* en su humanidad –autísticamente divorciada de su esencial razón de ser comunitaria y afectiva mientras cada vez más se nos impone como enajenante *cultura adictiva*– el presente trabajo se propone desmontar desde una perspectiva multidisciplinaria (histórica, religiosa, psicoanalítica y socio-política) la imbricada red de ilusiones que hace a un tiempo *posible e invisible* el actual estado de cosas. Un mundo “global” en el que sólo de hambre mueren dieciocho millones de seres humanos cada año –cifra silenciada en un mundo de cifras–, mientras que con la bandera del progreso justificamos cada nuevo adelanto. O lo que es lo mismo, cada nuevo exterminio de visiones alternativas que compitan con una moral de lucro.

Con este propósito, el texto presenta un contrapunto entre lo que en cambio *se valora* en culturas integradas a su corporeidad y afectividad –y por lo tanto, *psicológicamente*– como es el caso de las cosmovisiones indígenas y sincréticas de nuestra América, y la des-humanización que ha resultado de la progresiva adopción de una *ética prostética* en Occidente a partir del “Descubrimiento” y la Reforma. Los eventos que le dieron soporte.

La distinta lectura que hacen católicos y protestantes de *La Ciudad de Dios* –y que en gran medida explica la supervivencia de esas cosmovisiones alternativas *al sur* del Río Grande– es uno de los hilos conductores de estas reflexiones. De igual forma, la cartografía de nuestra vida síquica que nos legó Sigmund Freud –y no su trayectoria como guardián y chaperón de Eros– nos ayuda a dilucidar lo que subyace a nuestra global esquizofrenia.

Por último, fragmentos de la obra aún insuficientemente apreciada del filósofo argentino Rodolfo Kusch, me han servido para darles cauce, a través de los textos de varios etnológicos y académicos que se citan en la segunda mitad de este trabajo, a los matices de un saber afectivo enraizado en nuestro mundo, ya sea sincrético o indígena, que he querido resaltar para este texto.

# **Theological and Ministerial *Apuntes* About Immigration in a Different "Space"**

*Julian Andres González*

## **I. Introduction**

The issue of immigration touches personal realities in my life. I myself according to the definition by the United Nations am an immigrant in this country because I have been here for more than a year. Although I have not experienced the harsh realities of most migrants crossing the South border with Mexico, I share with the Latino immigrant community similar realities in our situation. I may begin with the lack of trust only for being "brown" and have an accent when speaking English. During a former time of ministry, this reality was a constant struggle to advance a Latino ministry at a local church. Some members of the congregation were highly distrustful of our presence in the church and our ideas about merging the mostly "white" membership with people from the immigrant community.

The community was out there, outside of the church walls, and the church was doing outreach activities. The church was trying to serve the community as long as they would not change the outlook of the church. We were the bridge between both sides trying to understand the "white" culture inside the church, the "brown" culture outside the church, and finding ways to connect both. In that double perspective, we realized that one of the issues behind the distrust to the immigrant is the lack of understanding of why we come here. A member of the church was involved in supporting the outreach activities to the community but his lack of understanding of the reasons we are here kept him at large making blanket judgments on people and believing they do not progress because they do not want. However, once he came closer to our activities and had the opportunity to meet people face to face, to struggle to speak in Spanish, to feel threatened because he was the outsider, and to know the legal situation of most of them, he was not longer able to make general judgments. He knew them, their intelligence, their spirit, and thus his outlook on the situation changed.

In this way, informed by a double reality as an immigrant and as a minister who has struggled to serve the immigrant community, I believe in the importance of researching the biblical and theological aspects of immigration for the benefit of the Church, its mission and ministry. First, to put a face to the title "immigrants" makes a whole lot of difference as the above example shows. The face of the immigrant makes the issue more complex for the local church but at the same time opens the possibility to a better and effective ministry. The issue is more complex than only providing activities for the immigrant community without actually



knowing the people. To get to know the emotions and existential reasons people have to leave home and listen to the stories directly from them is important for a service that is incarnated in the realities of the community. It goes beyond a service that is only intellectual with the attached idea that those whom I serve are in need of me and of what I bring, or a mere obligation to serve and feel well that in the end is actually self-service. In other words, actions to the detriment of reflection and personal encounter with the other is in the words of Paul Freire, mere *activism*, that is, action for the sake of action without the element of inter-dialogue.

Second, and following the first point, the Christian communities need to understand that outreach activities are more than ways to serve the community because that is the right thing to do. Outreach is the initial step for a deeper encounter between both groups in order to establish a closer relationship in which both groups are there to serve the other. In other words, the church communities are also there to receive from all the resources the immigrant community has, and the immigrant community must also realize that they are not in the lower side of the service only receiving help from the local church, but also full of resources and stories that can invigorate any church and make it healthier.

Finally, the concept of incarnated service works under the assumption that understands "the other" to be different from "me." That is to say, in the outreach activities the church is not trying to convert the other into the local church culture so that he/she after assimilating to the culture can finally join the church. The primary issue is conversation not conversion. In an incarnated service both sides change in the encounter. In other words, it is important to know the culture of the immigrant if the service is going to be effective. Local church assumptions of how things are, such as the issue with being on time for an appointment or meeting will have difficulties when planning activities in which both groups are going to be present. Matters of punctuality are different from many Latino cultures and may stir up the feelings of people who do not understand and/or accept the cultural differences and are swift to make value judgments of them.

Therefore, this article will address two aspects of the pastoral cycle, namely, the theological and ministerial aspects.<sup>1</sup> It will deal with the issue of biblical interpretation in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup> The design of the article will follow a particular methodology known as *the pastoral cycle* (Joe Holland, Peter) – a model which belongs to a large family of praxis-oriented approaches to critical theological inquiry. Analogous models to the pastoral cycle are: "see, judge, act" cycle (Cardinal Joseph Cardijn) and the "hermeneutical cycle" (Juan Luis

question of migration. I will present the complexity of any endeavor to use the Bible as a “sole authority” on ethical matters to decide a faith-based response to the social phenomenon of immigration. The categories of “nation,” “space,” and “history” will be addressed from a postcolonial perspective before presenting some theological views. As a result of the theological speculation, the second part will present ethical perspectives that might be helpful when churches try to do ministry among the immigrant communities in the U.S.

## II. Biblical and Theological Reflection: Understanding the Categories of “Space,” “Nation,” and “History”

*A woman crossing the border is caught up by a border patrol and she asks him a favor: “take out your gun and kill me right here because I am a walking ghost and there is no return for me. Please, at least, allow my children back in Honduras say that their mother died in America.” The officer stared at the woman, took the handcuffs off and said: ‘Ma’am, you are free to go, I have never seen you.’*

A survey on the ways in which the Bible is used to present ethical and theological considerations regarding the phenomenon of global migration clarifies at least one thing. The starting point drastically changes the conclusions on what specific actions should be taken to address the issue. Considerations of national security work under the assumption of the modern concept of nation-state developed in the 19th century (more on this below). It creates the reality that the arbitrary geopolitical delimitations called ‘geographical borders’ define people. The borders are the imaginary line that creates the binary between us and them. Organizations such as “Minuteman project,”<sup>2</sup> “Civil Home Defense,” “Ranch Rescue,” “Arizona Guard,” and the “American Border Patrol”<sup>3</sup> declare themselves as defenders of national security because the federal government has failed to address the issue of immigration.

The discourse on national identity is grounded on a definition of “space” in Western thought and experience. Michael Foucault reminds us that ‘space’ in Western epistemological categories was “treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.”<sup>4</sup> Nationalism is a form of

Segundo). In educational spheres, many approaches are inspired by Paul Freire. These models belong to a family of critical approaches to emancipatory praxis which outline a sequence of concrete steps to be undertaken at the grassroots levels.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.minutemanproject.com/> (last accessed on April 14, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.adl.org/learn/extremism\\_in\\_the\\_news/White\\_Supremacy/arizona\\_border\\_update52105.htm](http://www.adl.org/learn/extremism_in_the_news/White_Supremacy/arizona_border_update52105.htm) (last accessed on April 14, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 70.



narrative that is still the dominant form of socio-political formation affecting the shaping of identity. The individual and communal identification of people by reference to gentilic nouns: Mexican, Colombian, French, etc, works under the assumption that the imaginary geographical lines determines where people are from. These nouns also create a notion of subjectivity by "injecting" into the individual certain historical narratives on which an imagined community invents an identity, a self-image of themselves, through which they act to establish who is an insider and who is an outsider, foreigner, or migrant. The idea of nationalism justifies the nation as a legitimate force and cultural expression of the unification of people and culture(s) with certain geographical location that receives the name of state or land. However, according to Ernest Gellner,

"the basic deception and self-deception practiced by nationalism is this: nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population. It means that generalized diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by old cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves. That is what really happens."<sup>5</sup>

Another 19<sup>th</sup> century concept under revaluation in the current scholarly debate is history. The collapse of "history" as the dominant paradigm in which human experience unfolds in time perhaps begins with the events of WWII and the process of independence of the former colonial sites of 20<sup>th</sup> century empires. The Hegelian notion that history is where things happen in an orderly and 'rational' way, unfolding towards an ultimate eschatological reality is problematic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Global migration and all the socio-economic, political, and humanitarian problems around it, challenges the Hegelian notion. Migration is not a temporal circumstance that eventually will stop so that history will continue its unfolding towards a better world. Under the current economic paradigm of free-market Neoliberalism, migration is a "darker" side of the free-market, not a problem to fix so that the market may work better.

The International Organization for Migration (OIM) asserts that migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will transform "the global political and economic dynamics, technological revolutions

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<sup>5</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 6.

and social networks.”<sup>6</sup> But at the same time, the report asserts that these transformations will “exacerbate existing problems and generate new challenges”<sup>7</sup> to which most states “lack the capacity to effectively manage the international mobility of persons today.”<sup>8</sup> With an estimate of 1 billion migrants in the world today,<sup>9</sup> it is impossible to continue asserting the temporality of this phenomenon. The words of Walter Benjamin rightly describe this situation when he suggests that “the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule.”<sup>10</sup> Migration is part of the new norm in the beginning of this century and any ethical and theological perspective to address socio political realities should take it as a starting point. The 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of nationalism is under critical reevaluation<sup>11</sup> because “nation” has become an ultimate reality, a transcendent concept that defines people, sometimes disregarding the humanitarian crisis of individuals who “accidentally” happened to be born in the “wrong” side of the world.

The disarray of modern discourses on “history” and “space” has consequences on the theological debate. The collapse of “history”, that is, the loss of confidence in the epistemological claims of the Enlightenment, makes migration an important lens from which to develop theological and/or ethical perspectives. The notions of objectivity and rational inquiry no longer apply as philosophical frameworks on which to construct ethical guidelines because they work under the assumption that Western epistemologies are the norm to classify the rest of the world. Patriarchy, colonialism, the Holocaust, the environmental crisis, and the potential of current technological advances to destroy the earth, are reminders that the universality of western categories to name ‘reality’ needs to be dismantled in order to create a different conception of “space,” “history,” and “nation.”

In connection with the dilemma of the role of the Bible in the public discourse of global migration, this means that any theological endeavor also needs to find new philosophical

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared\\_mainsite/published\\_docs/wmr-2010/WMR-Executive-Summary.pdf](https://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared_mainsite/published_docs/wmr-2010/WMR-Executive-Summary.pdf) (Last accessed April 14, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>10</sup> W. Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in his *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257.

<sup>11</sup> Examples of this debate are: Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991); h.k. bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap press, 2006).

frameworks in order to avoid the claims to universality, objectivity, and "rational" inquiry. The purely descriptive approach of traditional methodologies is being replaced with approaches that pay attention to the reflective, critical and/or constructive dimension of biblical interpretation. In other words, claims to present "what the Bible says" about immigration still works under Western categories of objectivity and will continue to polarize the public discourse and the subjectivity of the individuals. But perhaps it is important to go one more step back and begin with the question whether the Bible has any role in the public discourse.

The diversity of perspectives on what the Bible says presents a challenge to answer the question. First of all, a survey of different perspectives into the problem shows the ways in which the argument is framed. Titles such as "A Biblical perspective on the Current Immigration Situation," perhaps convey the idea that the Bible has a concrete perspective on the matter. The use of the Bible under the modern paradigm of "objectivity" actually renders a very convoluted picture of what the Bible "really says." James Hoffmeier in "The Immigration Crisis: Immigrant, Aliens, and the Bible" advances the argument that the Bible "clearly" distinguishes between legal and illegal immigrants and the ethical imperatives only covered those living in the land of Israel legally. In "The Bible, the Church, and Human Rights in Contemporary debates about Hispanic Immigration" M. Daniel Carroll R. presents a more sympathetic view on immigration. He affirms the positive role of the Bible in the public arena and uses the modern discourse of human rights to present ways in which the Bible can be used to reshape the imaginary of individuals and communities to address the people coming from Latin and Central America. However, one of the assumptions of this article, perhaps representative of many others, is the conflation between the chosen people of God and "this" nation. He recognizes the problematic of sweeping generalizations,<sup>12</sup> but nevertheless he uses them throughout the article to describe the Anglo church as the majority and the immigrants as the minority.

The fact that people in the churches and biblical scholars in the academia are searching through the Bible in order to construct ethical imperatives and theological perspectives related to migration, is evidence that the Bible continues to have a claim, at least, for people who live by the conviction of an ultimate reality beyond this one that is somehow connected and/or related to our problems. And beyond that, the Bible may continue to inform the public discourse through claims about the definition of humanity in God's image, the narratives of migration that shed light on the tragic stories, the tremendous suffering, and the experience of

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<sup>12</sup> M. Daniel Carroll R. "The Bible, the church, and human rights in contemporary debates about Hispanic immigration in the United States." *Journal Of Latin American Theology* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 176.



dislocation that migrants face every day in their journey to “the fairylands of the north.” Theistic or atheistic interests in migration may use the Bible as a document in which ancient narratives and theological speculation inform the current debate by establishing a long perspective on the problem. In other words, by not being only a modern phenomenon of the last two centuries, the Bible helps to expand the horizon of possibilities to take into account when the public discourse is trying to establish policies to address the influx of foreigners into the nation-states of the modern world.

However, the supremacy of the Bible to establish a “clear” perspective on immigration is more a consequence of religious reactions to Enlightenment claims of the superiority of reason to the production of knowledge than a claim of the Bible itself.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, I submit that the role of the Bible in the public discourse cannot continue to be on the grounds of biblical final authority over any other ethical and theological perspective and the concept of authority needs to be reevaluated under different philosophical frameworks. The partisan rhetoric in which the Bible is used to advance certain ideological agendas continues to dominate the politics of interpretation and what goes unnoticed is that behind the issue of interpretation lies the politics of identity. The concept of “nation-state” and the conflation between God’s chosen people with certain nations are examples of this problem. When Hoffmeier differentiates between legal and illegal immigrants in the Bible in order to elucidate how the biblical accounts inform the public discourse he is involved in the politics of identity in which “nations” and “nationalism” are read back into the text, creating the contemporary imagination of self-evident and timeless application. According to Benedict Anderson, “nation” is “the most universally legitimate value in the political life of

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<sup>13</sup> Certainly the writings included in the Bible and many other ancient texts have been considered authoritative by different religious communities throughout the history of humanity. The Qumran documents are an example of a community who regarded most of the writings of the Hebrew Bible as authoritative for their spiritual life. The councils of the institutional church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. established a set of books the religious leaders in the Roman Empire under Constantine’s supervision considered authoritative for the life of the Christian church. The history of Scholasticism, the Reformation, and many other social and philosophical movements are evidence that the Bible has been considered authoritative for the life of some religious communities. However, the assessment of the supremacy of the Bible as a product of Enlightenment has to do with the emphasis on ‘reason’ as the supreme category to understand what the Bible really says. The category of ‘reason’ as the authoritative tool to understand humanity and the world, divested of any religious and/or spiritual dimension, is what it is critiqued. ‘Reason’ from an Enlightenment perspective becomes mostly a middle class male Western perspective to understand the Bible. In that sense, the Bible has no claims that it is through ‘reason’ that we can understand and apply its message.

our time.”<sup>14</sup> Gellner comments that “a man must have a nationality as he [sic] must have a nose and two ears... Having a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity, but it has now come to appear as such.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the connection between people/culture and a particular land/state in the modern understanding of the term ‘nation’ appears as belonging to each other from primitive time.

One of the consequences of this imaginary is that people are defined by identity markers like race, ethnicity, history, and culture. Since these concepts are closely connected with “nationalism,” it follows that the people living inside the imaginary lines of geopolitical borders have the legitimacy to occupy and to exercise ownership of the land. They have the “right” to decide what race and ethnicities and what cultural values and historical narratives are parts of the national identity and what are not. However, such correspondence between nationalism and ownership is historically contingent, not naturally given. In other words, peoples and nations are not necessarily destined for each other because they emerge independently. Gellner summarizes this point as follows:

Nations, like states, are a contingency, and not a universal necessity. Neither nations nor states exist at all times and in all circumstances. Moreover, nations and states are not the same contingency. Nationalism holds that they were destined for each other; that either without the other is incomplete, and constitutes a tragedy. But before they could become intended for each other each of them had to emerge, and their emergence was independent and contingent.<sup>16</sup>

The point is not to deny that the origins of nations can be placed before the rise of modernity. Adrian Hasting asserts that although the idea that a “nation” should have its own “state” became central to Western political thinking in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “it existed as a powerful reality in some places long before that.”<sup>17</sup> Actually, his key example is the nation of Israel in the Bible. For Hasting, Israel is “an all too obvious exemplar for Bible readers of what every other nation too might be, a mirror for national self-imaging.”<sup>18</sup> However, he also

<sup>14</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

seems to acknowledge that during the emergence of modern times national sentiment became a political reality.<sup>19</sup> In other words, one may say that although the ancient “nation” of Israel might be taken as a mirror of the modern concept of state, the correlation is not straightforward because it can be argued that what Israel wrote was not a narrative of nationhood.<sup>20</sup> The sentiments of desiring a land in the biblical narrative are not examples to assert that nation-formation and the histories about national identity are part of the nature of human beings. They are the creation of recent modern political history.

I have described the ways in which I have come to see the current problem of the role of the Bible in the public discourse. I have critiqued the categories of “space,” “nation,” and “history” in order to posit the need for a reevaluation of the authority of the Bible. And finally, I have proposed that migration is not a temporal phenomenon but a darker side of an economic system that unintentionally creates the conditions for people to migrate. Therefore, migration should be a starting point to theological speculation. Otherwise, any theology and ministerial programs to address the immigrant population may fall under the “modern” categories already described and continue see the other, the migrant, as only a problem.

In the second section of this article, I will shortly describe a different “space” from which to understand the authority of the Bible. This “space” should provide some grounds to develop a theology of migration in which even the divine being should be portrayed as a migrant in an eternal journey through the history of humanity; a being who understands the existential situation of the people on the move because God is with the migrants who leave their families and homes. Certainly, there are many theological entry points to speculate about migration from a religious perspective,<sup>21</sup> below I will focus on Christology in relation to migration.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>20</sup> See John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 21. Barclay asserts that during the Hellenistic era the bond of ethnicity constituted the core of the Jews’ distinctive identity. Certainly, the history of Israel is older than the Hellenistic time, but it gives a perspective on how the narratives may be dealing with other possible sources of identification.

<sup>21</sup> Kristin E. Heyer in *Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors*, engages the issue from a Roman Catholic perspective of liberation theology to describe the connection between personal and social sin in connection with migration. David True in *Immigration, identity, and God’s providence*, asserts the need to reclaim a ‘traditional’ understanding of divine providence with emphasis on the benevolence, goodness, and love expressed in a providential care for the earth and the people. Michael Purcell in *Christ, the Stranger: The Ethical Originality of Homelessness* uses critical theory from Emmanuel



### III. A Different Space

How can one imagine people outside of the modern categories of "nation" and "history"? How can people create a different identity when these categories are so fixed in our imagination? How to talk about the immigrant who is journeying to the north without using the discourse of nationalism, and when any attempt is susceptible to frame the identity of the immigrant within the self-identity of the West as universal categories? In other words, how to talk about the other, the one who is not like us, without referring to the West? Homi Bhabha suggests that "it is when the western nation comes to be seen... as one of the dark corners of the earth, that we can begin to explore new places from which to write histories of peoples and construct theories of narration."<sup>22</sup> He continues saying that "the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the people of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis... The bastion of Englishness crumbles at the sight of immigrants and factory workers."<sup>23</sup> The images of the nation-space in its transnational dimension, says Bhabha, are challenged by those

"who have not yet found their nation: amongst them the Palestinian and the Black South Africans... Their persistent questions remain to remind us, in some form or measure, of what must be true for the rest of us too: 'When did we become "a people"? When did we stop being one'? Or are we in the process of becoming one? What do these big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others?"<sup>24</sup>

Levinas to affirm that theology is ethics. For Purcell, homelessness is a theological issue that invites to see the migrant as a person and not in economic and technical terms. Daniel G. Groody in *Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees* reflects critically on the mystery of God in an age of migration, which is a way of thinking about the gospel in light of the sign of the times. He asserts that global migration presents another opportunity to ground theological analysis in a specific social location that emerges from the "joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" of many marginal people today. Orlando O. Espin in *Immigration, Territory and Globalization: Theological Reflections* considers a new ecclesiology that redefines the terms of Catholicity and Nepantlah (where abundant dialogue occurs). He asserts that in the contemporary globalization, immigration is not going to stop. Thus, theology should engage migration as the contemporary context from which to create new theological meaning.

<sup>22</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," in *Nation and Narration* (ed. Homi K. Bhabha; USA: Routledge, 1990), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.

He argues that “the ‘locality’ of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must be seen as ‘other’ in relation to what is outside or beyond it.”<sup>25</sup> The problem of insider/outsider is a process of hybridity<sup>26</sup> that is constantly incorporating new “people” in relation to the body politic, therefore, producing sites of political antagonism and forces for political representation.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the static imaginary lines of geopolitical borders are not fixed, dead, and immobile (in Foucault’s words), but an incomplete process of signification that turns the boundaries into a “space;” in Bhabha’s words, an *in-between* space, that allows the negotiation of meaning and political authority.<sup>28</sup> Theology, in order to divest itself from ‘static’ concepts of “nation” and “people,” needs to take account of the cultural difference whereby national sentiments are signified and theology should become an ambivalent “space” of speculation through which the encounter of crossroads allows the formation of a new transnational culture and imagination of the divine. For Bhabha, “the ‘other’ is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously ‘between ourselves’.”<sup>29</sup>

Bhabha helps us to disrupt the dualistic thinking that lies behind much of the theological and political speculation around the phenomenon of migration. Using Freud’s concept of “narcissism of minor differences”, Bhabha provides a way to understand the ways in which hybridity of culture is also true at the local (internal) level of the modern nation. The Western nation that receives the immigrant population “may imperceptibly turn into a contentious *internal* liminality providing a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent.”<sup>30</sup> That is to say, we need to read the Bible *as* and *with* immigrants, not about immigrant.

The *walking ghost* of the woman crossing the border may be an entry point into reading in this way. The encounter between a symbol of national security and an immigrant places the discourse of nationalism in problems. The idea of “nation” may be one for the border patrol, but when he met an immigrant and heard her story, the encounter changed his perspective. The migrant is not an undefined amorphous body passing from one side to the other. He/she is a person who comes with a story saying that there is no future from where she comes. One could be schooled on the idea of a sovereign nation, one that has achieved a “special” position among other nations; “nation” meaning all people who belong to this side of the border. But, when one begins to know the story of the other side, not only of a nation but the story of the

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>26</sup> bhabha, “Introduction,” in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>30</sup> Homi k. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 148.

individual person that crosses the border, the concept of the humanity of the people changes any static concept of nation. The discourse on migration cannot be separated from the reality of the humanity of people. When they are separated, one only sees numbers. The people crossing the border, in its majority, are passing because they have great basic needs to fulfill. People undergo extreme circumstances to cross. Women are raped, people are robbed by gangs and left stranded without money. Those riding the train risk to fall under it, and some have lost their legs, arms, and even lives.

Here is where the theological aspect comes to play an important role. One cannot define ethics under a black-and-white concept of "from here (the border line) is my nation," applying a code of ethics only for those within the borders. The value of the human life should prevail over any notion of nation and ethics. The challenge, then, resides in learning to see the immigrant in a different way. The by-products of the narrative of nationalism, namely, the categories of *undocumented*, *illegal*, *irregular*, and *alien* are hindrances to see in each person an inner dignity given by the theological concept of being created in the image of God. The biblical narratives of the Exodus and the Exile are stories from which to learn what imperatives should prevail. The Exodus is an example of what happened to Israel after coming to power and prosperity. Amnesia to their slavery in Egypt led them to mistreat those who came to it as strangers and immigrants. In other words, to deter this amnesia, the communities receiving new people should undergo a cognitive migration. It means to see Christ in the eyes of the immigrant and see the immigrant with the eyes of Christ."<sup>31</sup>

Ignacio Ellacuria talks about *El pueblo crucificado* (the crucified people) as a result of historical actions. This concept may help us to understand the ways in which one can see Christ in the eyes of the immigrant. Ellacuria asserts that, "crucified people is understood as that collectivity, who being the majority of humanity, owes its situation of crucifixion to a social order promoted and supported by a minority that holds sway in function of a set of factors, which, as such and given its specific historical effectiveness, should be estimated as sin [my translation]."<sup>32</sup> Additionally, "Christ in the eyes of the immigrant" means that the immigrant population as a collectivity is an agent of salvation. Ellacuria asserts that, "what the Christian faith adds to the historical observation of the oppressed people is the suspicion that, besides being the main recipient of salvific effort, will not be too in their crucified situation

<sup>31</sup> Miguel A. De la Torre, *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 29.

<sup>32</sup> Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino, eds., *Mysterium Liberationis: Conceptos Fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación* (vol. II of *Mysterium Liberationis*; Valladolid: Trotta, 1990), 201.



source of salvation for the world [my translation].”<sup>33</sup> Although this theological perspective may be taken as the need of many to suffer so that a few may enjoy, a problem Ellacuria is aware of,<sup>34</sup> in the current global phenomenon of immigration, the assertion helps to highlight the humanity of the migrants. Beyond a generalizing idea that all migrants should suffer for the benefit of others, the point is the analysis of the economic and political systems of crucifixion that dehumanize the majority of the global population.

Another way to see “Christ in the eyes of the immigrants” is to discern in what ways the immigrant embodies Christ. Matthew 25:31-46 describes the ways in which one may encounter Jesus. The list includes the thirsty, the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the one in prison. In other words, the recognition that migrants are not only in need of food for their bodies but who also need to be recognized in their humanity; a humanity that Jesus also recognizes as part of him by asserting that to the extent that people provide for others in need they are also providing to him. Documentaries such as *Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary*, *The Other Side of Immigration*, and *The New Americans* offer ways to understand the humanitarian crises through which one can find Christ in the eyes of the immigrant.

However, one should be aware of the ‘unintentional’ consequences of looking at the migrants as only the dehumanized people of today. This becomes a problem when any theology that asserts and works through this perspective takes again a ‘universalistic’ perspective that reduces migration to a single theological approach. To see Christ in the migrants as described in Matthew 25 still works under the paradigm of hospitality with a hidden power differential. When the giver of hospitality feels he/she is not reciprocated because the immigrant is not grateful of all the effort and material benefits he/she has received, hospitality may become another resentful sentiment to reject or stop the humanitarian intervention.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>34</sup> Certainly, Ellacuria’s version of a theology of liberation from a Latin American perspective still works under a modern paradigm because it homogenizes the poor, is hostile to religious pluralism and maintains an incessant biblicism. However, his notion of the crucified people helps to see the systems that oppress the people and transform them into problems and numbers.

<sup>35</sup> In this case, postcolonial perspectives may help to develop a broader view on migration. It goes beyond a liberationist reading by critiquing and questioning the text itself and not only the Western appropriations of it. In other words, the imbalances of power which are part of the exhortations in Matthew 25 are critiqued by post-colonialism. In this way, it strives not to remain in the incessant biblicism of liberation theology. That

Perhaps one way to make a contrapuntal reading of Matthew 25 is by using the concept of discipleship as the capacity to assume a responsibility for another.<sup>36</sup> A responsibility that goes beyond a mere *activism*, that in the ideas of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* can be summarized as an action for the sake of action without dialogue and self-sacrifice. In other words, it is hospitality with a deep sense of responsibility; a sense of responsibility that calls the giver to re-visit the concept of hospitality. Hospitality is then beyond and above the modern concept of "nation" and "space" (discussed above), in which the migrant is reduced to the "same other" by the politics of identity. This kind of hospitality is not part of an ethical code by which a nation measures itself. It is hospitality as a measure of humanity.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, one may go beyond the imperative of hospitality in Matthew 25 by considering the Christology of Matthew. In Matthew 8.20, Jesus says that "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head." The Matthean Jesus "has already displaced himself for the sake of the Kingdom... Jesus leaves the familiar and familial and 'becomes a homeless rabbi. Jesus ... displaces himself and becomes intentionally homeless... for the sake of the Kingdom and its proclamation.'"<sup>38</sup> In other words, one may argue that the giver of eternal hospitality has become homeless. Jesus shows the ambivalence of the two sides of hospitality, and by doing so, blurs the divide between them and problematizes the power differentials. The idea of Jesus on both sides disturbs the politics of identity with the agenda of assimilation, or neutralization of alterity. When the immigrant also represents Christ, perhaps it is the giver of hospitality who needs to assimilate or be open to what the migrant brings. The migrant is not a stateless person because his/her value and identity does not depend on the nation he/she has left behind. Therefore, the language of 'stranger' does not imply lack of identity and should provide a way to appreciate that the stranger is also the inhabitant of the land, not only the migrant. In the words of Derrida, it is an inverting of freedom and responsibility in which the insiders are defined by the "individuals and communities outside the confines, boundaries, and structures – whether geographical, social, or cultural."<sup>39</sup>

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ess to say, a postcolonial reading of Matthew 25 decolonizes the text and the Western readings by disclosing the power differentials and the ambivalence of the text itself.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Purcell, *Christ, the Stranger: The Ethical Originality of Homelessness*. In *Migration in a Global World*, ed. Solanger Lefebvre, (London: SCM Press, 2008), 63.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Purcell, *Christ, the Stranger: The Ethical Originality of Homelessness*, 64.

The term *hospitality*<sup>40</sup> (being hostage-hospitable) conveys the idea of the blurring of power differentials that is part of the concept of “receiving nation.” Therefore, the question “how to talk about the other without referring to the West, perhaps is better framed by asserting the necessity to decentralize and/or de-universalize the West, not to eliminate it altogether from the discourse. Hospitality then works in this way because it rejects the blanket assumption that the “receiving nations” are God’s chosen people, perhaps embracing a new idea: the migrant is also the giver of blessings, the chosen people of God.

#### IV. A Ministerial Response

It is clear from the biblical and theological response that there is no single, unified, totalizing answer to address the issue of international migration. An endeavor with ‘universalistic’ goals would end up contradicting itself and following the epistemological structures critiqued in the previous section.

What strategies would, then, the local church use to help and connect immigrants of all cultures? A common church-answer to this question would include a better church-program that is aware of the diversity of the membership and is proactive in addressing the cultural differences. Additionally, it would include mission trips to a place in this country where probably they may need summer programs for children and help with building homes, or mission trips to other countries in order to help in specific activities for a short period of time. The mission of the church has basically been reduced to the service the members of a congregation can provide to address the needs of a community for a short term. In this section, I would like to look at the three faces of power<sup>41</sup> as a way to enunciate strategies an individual, organization, or church can use to actively engage the migrant population and the systems around it. The basic church-model of service generally lacks an important characteristic of the “kin-dom of God.”<sup>42</sup> it does not seek justice and is satisfied with a reduced understanding of service.

Power shapes the worldview of individuals and communities. One of the outcomes is the tendency to the “naturalization” of relationships and socio-political categories of race and

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<sup>40</sup> This concept was introduced by Melba Lynette Ross in her presentation on April 4, 2012 for the class “Immigration, Bible, and Practical Theology” at Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, TX.

<sup>41</sup> This information is taken from the “Grassroots policy project.” See <http://www.strategicpractice.org>

<sup>42</sup> I prefer to use this word over “kingdom” in order to emphasize the sense of community and mutual relationship between the members of the kin-dom.



gender. This becomes a problem when 'naturalization' leads to a sense of political 'powerlessness' that tends to see the dominant worldview of the society as 'common sense' where governments are inefficient, politicians are not trustful, and human beings are defined with an anthropology in which people are "naturally" competitive, transforming egoism and individual benefit as desirable values in the modern society. The connection with the other is denied, because that person is always a competitor and seldom a neighbor.

A church-program or agenda, then, should address the issue of power by developing a political consciousness through the lenses of the characteristics of the "kin-dom of God."<sup>43</sup> The common teaching on a Sunday morning reduces the concept of the kin-dom to a spiritual individualistic sense in which it only seeks to "gain" new souls so that the kin-dom may grow.<sup>44</sup> It seldom works from a holistic understanding of the human being reducing the gospel only to evangelization so that people are "saved" from the final destination of hell. Many churches, first, need to understand that the message of the gospel is primarily political, undermining the powers that be and teaching a shift of worldview, that is a change in the cultural beliefs, norms, traditions, histories and practices that shape political meaning. Any program should help members of any congregation put together into a broader perspective how life experiences, daily interactions at work, school, and the local community shape one's own political consciousness. At the same time, it should confront the "social common sense"<sup>45</sup> with a political reading of the gospel that addresses the current socio-economic crises affecting communities around the world and how the crises are also local problems shaping the understanding of subjectivity and religious identity.

Since migration is a global phenomenon that drastically has undermined the positivist assumptions of the last century, theology should begin with this social reality as a point to understand the reality of individuals, communities, and nations. It should provide ways to critically evaluate the prevailing ideas and beliefs that are part of the dominant worldview, which in many occasions constrains people's awareness of power differentials and structural oppression.

We need to see beyond our own noses, and realize that even we need the help of another person if we want to see our own backs. In order to look beyond conventional explanations of

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<sup>43</sup> This is the third face of power: the shifting worldview. In this face, the goal is to develop critical thinking that is able to connect local socio-political and economic issues with the larger context of the city, the state, and the world.

<sup>44</sup> I am aware that my reductionistic description of what the church does comes from my personal experience with some churches in Texas and back in my country.

<sup>45</sup> I am referring here to the dominant-most-of-the-time-corporate-conservative understanding of reality.

the ways things are, the Bible should be seen as a tool for critical analysis of the world, its social problems, and as a way to imagine new possibilities to organize our social and political realities. The anthropology of the current neo-liberal free market promotes an individualistic definition of human beings based on the myth of “lift yourself up by your own bootstraps.” Social relations are predominantly seen under the rubric of competition and the economy becomes a “natural force” that separates winners from losers. There is no one to blame but “you” when you do not succeed in the free-market economy. The social constructions of race, proper of the modern notion of “nation-state” still shape the theological speculation and subordinates people of “color” in all spheres of life dehumanizing them. A theology of immigration should provide a way to resist the anthropology of the free-market capitalist system by asserting the humanity of the migrant and his/her condition as the chosen people of God.

However, the construction of kin-dom values and the shifting of worldviews *inside* the church are not enough. Power should also be addressed from a more active way. The second face of power: building infrastructure to shape political agendas, becomes important.<sup>46</sup> The church should help to break the dominant way to make sense of reality, the ways the dots are connected, in order to make a new meaning. The words of the gospel of Matthew are appropriate for this task, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10.34). The prophetic task of the church should not remain only in the practice of inspirational messages in their educational program and preaching series. It should engage the wider population, other churches, organizations, and individuals who also are working under the same vision. In other words, the Christian Church should promote ecumenism with social justice, emphasizing other religious and non-religious communities. By itself, the church remains static, isolated and outmoded by a vibrant immigrant population that is claiming the need to develop new and improved theological understandings of God and our existence in this world.

The point is not to fight the current socio-economic paradigm with only the facts of the dehumanizing consequences it has had for the majority of the population. By promoting a political reading of the Bible and a prophetic task beyond the pulpit, the idea is the development of new paradigms. In other words, to promote a different ‘reality,’ a new sense of identity and a new way to imagine the world in which the immigrant cannot continue being portrayed as the stranger, the foreigner, without identity and to whom ‘we’ offer hospitality under the traditional power dynamics. I recognize that this task is not clear, and there is much less agreement among people who advocate for changes in the

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<sup>46</sup> The second face of power is called “Building infrastructure to shape political agendas.”



political and socio-economic dimensions of the world. This is what makes all the more important the ecumenical task that promotes the continuous sharing and sharpening of ideas of a different global imagined community.

The Church is the body of Christ in this world. This body is then a political entity that does not bring peace when the dominant reality is oppressive to the majority of the population. The sword that Jesus mentions in Matthew 10 should be understood as the social advocacy working for the reconstruction of a fallen world. However, the churches should also address the first face of power: direct political involvement. Perhaps, some theologians would say that the Christian Church has nothing to do in helping which candidates get elected to office, or engaging in direct action: strikes, petitions, accountability, etc. But the point is to highlight what Matthew 6.21 says, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This insight, applied to the current budget of many churches, probably would show that the majority does not have their heart with the immigrant. Churches give virtually no support to organizations working for immigration reforms or servicing directly the immigrant population in their daily struggles.<sup>47</sup> The churches may try to open a worship service in Spanish; plan mission trips to Central America, have a food pantry, and sometimes go to the border to know the reality of the immigrant. But to give money for the support of organizations directly engaged in changing laws and policies would be taken as a political move, perhaps not well taken by the membership who does not agree with helping the immigrant or changing the *status quo*. The church daring to give money risks losing also its members.

Unfortunately, the picture is different. Christianity frequently supports the market system by working as the psychological/spiritual element that assuages the anxiety of the individual each Sunday, helping him/her to be ready to come to the system one more week. However, the socio-political engagement of the church seeking justice should not forget the holistic care of the immigrants. In other words, the service-oriented dimension of a Christian ministry with the migrant population should not be neglected.<sup>48</sup> The psychological and economic realities of the migrant should be addressed by

<sup>47</sup> This assessment is the result of my personal involvement with church committees in which so-called "mission budgets" predominantly was directed to service-oriented activities of the members of the church to individuals and communities in specific circumstances and in short period of times.

<sup>48</sup> One caveat is pertinent at this point. The churches should keep the political-prophetic dimension in constant tension with the healing-restorative ministry. Otherwise, healing



the ministry of the local church. The effects of displacement on people's lives are important. There is emotional damage as the consequence of mistreatment, abuse, frustrations, and traumatic experiences. Migrants leave behind families and are constrained in their mobility when the migration is not under the current legal channels. This makes migrants vulnerable to depression, particularly during special holidays. Their concept of self-esteem and dignity suffers drastically by the simple fact of being away from home in a different culture.

Therefore the presentation of the gospel to the migrant population should take into account these realities. A theological exposition of Christian doctrines with its bombastic language and philosophical concepts should be subsumed under a more practical preaching of the application of the biblical stories in their lives. In other words, the teaching of the church necessarily needs to address the issues of self-esteem and emotional damage; it should be a ministry of healing and restoration. In order to address the needs of the migrant community, it is necessary to get to know the community that the church wants to serve. What are their specific needs? What are their strengths? What are the available resources? What are the internal and external sources of threat? Sports activities help to overcome the issue of language differences and reduce the need of translation.<sup>49</sup>

A strong program that offers classes tailored to the community's needs makes a lot of difference. A curriculum that includes English, music, exercise, handcrafts, and computer classes may be attractive to migrants who are looking for economic options and ways to restore their self-esteem. Usually people need and want to learn new things. If they are immigrants or they do not speak English very well, they need English classes to make their lives a little bit easier in this country. People also need support to learn how to use computers in order to get a better job. Other people may need to learn handcraft, music, exercise or different ways to cope with their feelings. However, above all the different parts of a curriculum planned to help migrants, people need to create, develop, and establish new relationships, a support network. The church should then be willing to listen to their stories, to visit their homes, to eat their food, to learn about their lives, and to show them God's love through actions and words, and *be ready to be changed by them*. Migrants coming from Central and Latin America in their majority bring a strong sense of family that goes beyond the nuclear concept of parents and children. The church should practice being the family by offering shelter, protection, and fellowship, and in this way promoting a deep sense of belonging that help to restore broken relationships and heal emotional wounds.

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would become a tool of the system to 'normalize' suffering and/or the prophetic seeking justice would lose sight of the pressing realities of the migrant.

<sup>49</sup> For example, soccer is easy to implement because one only needs a ball and whatever object might work as a goalpost.

## Resumen

El artículo sigue el diseño de una metodología llamada "el ciclo pastoral", un modelo que a su vez pertenece a un grupo más grande de acercamientos teológicos con énfasis en la práctica. Solo se exploran dos de los cuatro pasos del ciclo, la reflexión teológica y una respuesta ministerial.

Después de una breve introducción del por qué dicho énfasis es relevante, la reflexión discute las categorías de "espacio", "nación", e "historia" como parte de las suposiciones detrás de la especulación teológica y criterios prácticos de un plan ministerial para afrontar el fenómeno de migración internacional. Se sugiere que este fenómeno no es temporal sino que hace parte de la nueva realidad del siglo XXI. Por lo tanto, migración se convierte en un punto de partida para toda especulación teológica que utiliza la Biblia como fuente para construir parámetros éticos que iluminen el tema y ayuden a tomar decisiones concretas y desarrollar prácticas de cómo afrontarlo.

En la segunda parte, se sugiere un tipo de "espacio" diferente que ayuda a construir un imaginario teológico donde la divinidad esta también en constante migración. El énfasis es en Cristología, la cual se explora en los evangelios desde un punto de vista postcolonial.

La tercera parte describe algunos puntos ministeriales informados por la reflexión teológica desarrollada. Se sugiere que la Biblia es un documento político y debe leerse teniendo en cuenta dichas conexiones.

Finalmente, se utilizan conceptos de planeación estratégica con énfasis en el análisis de como las dimensiones políticas, sociales, y económicas de las dinámicas de poder afectan la concepción de "realidad" desde un punto de vista individual y colectivo y se enumeran algunas acciones concretas que un plan ministerial puede utilizar para servir a la creciente comunidad de inmigrantes.



